

Without a Hitch

by The Antic Repartee

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Summary: A Hitchups continuum: Hiccup made a choice, and that choice opened an entire universe of experiences. A series of one-shots tell the story before, during, and after the epic prologue Hitchups. The journey to Ragnar  k is a long one. *categories may change*

1. The Lesson

****Read Hitchups first. I repeat: Read Hitchups first. Or you will read this and think, "what, what, what?"****

****To those who _have_ read Hitchups:****

****Without A Hitch is a series of one-shots capturing moments of Hiccup's life. Some occur many, many years after Hitchups, some occur as _off-screen_ Hitchups scenes, and some occur during his childhood before he made that fateful decision. Some will follow Hiccup and Toothless exclusively and some may deviate into the lives of other Berkians. There is no particular order that the chapters come, you'll have to look at the title for some guidance and the date before each chapter.****

****But for now I will start this story at the end.****

****The Lesson****

* * *

><p>P.R. (Post Ragnar  k)_

* * *

><p>Making peace.<p>

That's what they called it  "those lucky few with the opportunity to prepare for death. Those who were lucid in their last breaths, who

knew when death was inevitable, spent their final thoughts reflecting on their lives. From silent eulogies conducted in the privacy of their hearts to loud laments directed at their chosen faith, humans wanted to find meaning in their lives and deaths.

Not Hiccup. He had every intention of clearing his head and rushing straight into the afterlife. No lamentation necessary. No nostalgia. He harbored no fear for what awaited him on the Other Side and held no attachment to this world. He was ready to let go.

Unfortunately for Hiccup, his mind had a mind of its own.

Humans weren't meant to live forever.

His head dropped against the wall. Dull pain resonated through his skull but he couldn't feel itâ€”not really. Not amongst the throbbing and the numbing blood loss that kept his wits at bay, and certainly not with the sting of countless abrasions and the thirst that clawed his throat and tongue.

He didn't remember sliding down the bricks, or the ache in his knees as they buckled under his dead weight, but somehow Hiccup ended up seated on stained tarmac. A bloated body of a soldier lay next to him, the silhouette of another just feet beyondâ€”and another, and another, all trailing to the mouth of the alley where yet more bodies dotted the smoke stricken streets. Only the body at his side called for Hiccup's attention, its state of decay fouling the air. In truth, Hiccup couldn't tell if it were a soldier that accompanied him or a civilian; the line had been blurred back when the human population first dropped into the millions.

The ground beneath his neighbor was black with dried bloodâ€”caked and flaky compared to the moist, rotting flesh it once seeped from and a stark contrast his own blood creeping along the pitch. Hiccup watched the warm, bright red roll over the stone and slide between cracks.

He was draining and he would do nothing to staunch it. Why would he?

Because humans weren't meant to live forever.

Hiccup hated the vibrant, healthy hue of his blood: the blood of a younger man, from a body no older than half-a-century. He wanted black blood. Thick and dead and sluggish, like the boy next to him. He wanted his blood to match his mind and to match his soul.

His irritation flickered and cooled. Young blood ran quicker, and this blood fled from his body and soaked his clothes. The faster he drained, the sooner he could rest.

His breath came shallow nowâ€”partly to suffer the stench of his surroundings and partly because he lacked the strength to manage a full lungful of air. His head pounded. His tongue ached for drink. His eyelids dipped and closed. There was nothing pretty to look at anyway; nothing worth effort against the sweet pull of death.

Hiccup would die in this alley, alone and filthy, and the thought appealed to him. Eternal sleep had eluded him for too long.

Damn them.

He should have died years ago. Decades ago. Centuries. His mind had broken time and again and it was impossible to desensitize himself enough not to care. Every woman that had grown old without him, every child that passed before him...it tore at his mentality like the poisoned claws of a Nightshade. Manticores and unicorns. Mermaids, sea serpents and dragons. _Gods. They _were meant to live forever. Not men. Not him.

Hiccup swallowed dryly. He heard a rasping noise and wondered if it were his own voice. Was he laughing? Was he breathing? He couldn't tell. The world sounded as though his ears were stuffed with cotton and the air tasted of pestilence.

Is this the taste he would die with in his mouth? Would it matter? Which memories followed in deathâ€”if any did at all: those final, agonizing breaths and surreal visuals? Or just those of the beginning, when he felt truly alive?

Hiccup peered again at the body beside him. It was male, young by the hair roots and muscle tone, but it was impossible to tell how handsome the lad had once been with a swollen face crawling with maggots and ants. Hiccup was more interested in the bulging pockets of the cargo pants. His passing was too slow and his mind too active. He needed something more than blood loss to numb him.

Pity his arms felt too heavy to bother searching the body.

"Got a light?" Hiccup croaked to his alley partner. A fly ran from the man's sunken nose cavity to his forehead.

Hiccup snorted. Cigarettes were more rare than money; he had seen men killed over a pack. The likelihood that the young soldier had any on his person was bordering impossible, but Hiccup could not deny that he wouldn't mind dying with one in his mouth. A disgusting habit that churned bad breath and bad skin, but he lost his care for such things when he had less and less to live for.

"How 'bout aâ€”" Hiccup coughed, blood speckled his bottom lip.
"...drink?"

Hiccup missed alcohol more than smoking. It had become a crutch periodically throughout his life and had sourced a number of memorable mistakes, but the need to numb his senses was ever present in his life. More so now than in recent memory. He heard they'd begun production again.

First alcohol would come back. Then civilization. Then government. Then corruption. That's usually how it worked.

"Camera?"

Cameras.

Maybe it was because he sat in a ruined city, grayed in every sense but bodyâ€”maybe it was because he suddenly wanted to remember something other than the man he was these last few years, but _cameras_ flew to Hiccup's mind as he struggled with his final

inhalations.

He had not seen a camera in nearly five years. A pity: that was one of his favorite inventions. The hearts of humans could fall in love over and over again, the phantom sensations left by deep emotions would imprint on the soul for eternity, but faces would always fade from memory. Pictures captured a moment, actions and stories and _faces_, so that even years later he could ignite a shadow of the stirrings someone once gave him. A wife. A child. A hope. A regret.

Hiccup hummed an old tune as he attempted to recreate in his mind the last photo he ever saw. He couldn't.

Even pictures lost their effect when senility settled in. He tried to grasp onto memories but they slipped through his lumbering attempts at organizing his thoughts. His mind was overripe like the fruit that had past its prime on the branch and was left to shrivel and perish feet above the earth, held captive by the tree and unable to join the earth in its decay. It worked like the hands of a centenarian with bone-cancer: clumsy, sluggish and frustratingly brittle. The longer he lived, the less he remembered.

The less he cared.

Oh. The apathy.

Toothless.

Hiccup sent two, silent curses towards the heavensâ€"one to the gods, and one to that loathsome Night Fury. They were supposed to do this together. Live together and die together. But Hiccup had gone fourteen years without his familiar, and that took a far greater toll on his mind than anything else. He could deal with tragedies and heartbreak. He still knew how to cry before Toothless died, and crying was one of the greatest reliefs humans had at their disposal. There was a reason they cried out of emotion; it was for the same reason they laughed and screamed, murdered and sacrificed. It was a human necessity of release.

His grip on reality slipped faster and faster with every day he was forced to suffer Midgard without his other half. The others could see it too.

Hiccup started. The movement ripped pain through his obliques.

Those were _her_ words. _**Suffer Midgard**_. And suffer he did.

Hiccup grinned. Blood colored his teeth red but no one was around to admire his smile.

The words of the tune he hummed came to him. "My body is a cage... we take what we are given..."

He was done living. He was done suffering. He lived through enoughâ€"through his great loves and great regrets and many, many should-have-been deaths. Through the children he learned long ago not to have because watching them die hurt too much, a lesson he took too long to learn and the scars upon his heart would never

fade.

Instead, he learned to make everyone his child. He learned to imprint on lives, to see potential in each generation and help it come to pass. He learned that the young and inexperienced had wisdom of their own. He learned to listen to them because too much confidence in ones own experience stopped growth. Then he learned to stop growing.

Now he really needed that drink. He could drink to the lives he saved and the lives he'd taken. To the life he wanted to give up for centuries.

But that lead straight back to the problem.

"Just because you've forgotten...doesn't mean you're forgiven."

Humans didn't just die because their bodies had an expiration date on them. They died because their minds earned the reward of eternal rest. They died because the heart was too stupid to know when it had too much.

So today he would die.

Any moment now.

"I'm living in an age," Hiccup's voice dipped to a whisper. His eyes lowered. He didn't want to look at the bodies around him.

He could have gotten out of here earlier, out of this town, but he didn't. Maybe he knew. Maybe somewhere, through instincts or forethought, he knew he would find a way out by staying. A final out. There wasn't anything left for him to do in this world. They had no choice but to let him die.

His blood continued to stream outward like the growing branches of a tree. His stomach was hot and sticky. His shirt was ruined.

The world was soon to find its upswing. Rebirth was upon Midgard, Hiccup didn't need to see it come to pass.

They couldn't ask anything more of him. They wouldn't dare.

"Just because you've forgotten, doesn't mean you're forgiven."

Hiccup's ear twitched. A steady thud of feet marched upon the earth. They were coming. He could hear them in their uniformity and terror, and they would pass him. This he knew. He was just another body on a side street. All he had to do was wait for death to take him, pale, with a blood crusted beard and eyes as grey as the city walls. It would be peaceful; the pain had dulled enough to ignore and he had nothing left to addle his mind with. Hiccup did more than fight in Ragnar k; he trained those who would continue to fight for the future. He touched the world. He served his purpose. He just wanted to sleep.

His eyes closed.

Green.

His eyes were green once. Like his soul used to be. A fresh green, as fresh as his mind had been. Eyes that matched his body.

Death had to be earned, someone told him. _Death in one world foretold the paths of the next._

Who told him that?

Hiccup bit his lip. All he wanted to do was sleep. He was old and he was tired.

But who told him that?

Death had to be earned. An old voice with no gender that he could recall told Hiccup this. He was young when the advice came to him. There were others around him.

Hiccup scowled. He hated senior citizens. He hated the special treatment they received simply because their bodies had given out along with their minds. He wanted that.

Yet his eyes reopened to stare at the wall that had faced him. Chipped bricks darkened by fire. Beneath that, graffiti. Hiccup tried to picture those bricks centuries ago, when they were bright and heavy and stacked one upon the other by the hands of immigrants.

Green eyes.

Hiccup had been civilized and removed from the Viking way early in his life; his birth culture had all but vanished as the world spun new religions and power shifted about the globe with child-like flitting, and he let it. He welcomed innovation and progress. He spitefully ignored the traditions of his forefathers, and then the seas swallowed the islands and coasts of the world, burying the lands of his forefathers for eternity, Hiccup allowed it.

He never cared for the Viking way. He had _his_ way.

Strange. The faintest touches of bitterness touched the back of his throat, tainting the coppery coating with a sour bite. He hadn't felt anything but indifference towards Berk for a very long time. He was a boy when he last let his childhood bother him. How queer that such a feeling revisited him on the moment of his death.

Death.

Green eyes. Death had to be earned.

He wanted to sleep, but he couldn't die sleeping. He could not sit and let death take him. Not if he could hear them coming. Not when his death was guaranteed, anyway.

Death in one world foretells the paths of the next. Doubtless, Viking mentality.

"Damn," Hiccup whispered. What was he doing? All he had to do was sit there. It was time for his eternal rest. It was time for him to find

Toothless again.

Yet a groan pushed passed his lips as he leaned sideways and reached for the pack on the soldier's hip. His fingers fumbled, slow and heavy in his fading conscious, until he grasped the smooth glass of a vial.

He remembered now. Moments away from peace and Hiccup had to remember sitting with his peers in the Meade Hall. He remembered having to kneel on the bench to properly see over the table and listening to the gyÃ°ja give a lesson on the old customs.

Even then _she_ marked his life. Dead for eons and he still let her.

Hiccup's heart felt light and jumpy even before he injected the adrenaline into his body.

He never cared for Vikings in his life; he could never live as one.

Perhaps he would die as one.

* * *

><p>And with that, the first chapter of Without a Hitch is FINALLY done. **This is particular chapter is part one of two. The final chapter will be placed at the end of this story...like an AU one-shot sandwich, beginning and ending on the same note...but that's a long way off. The title 'The Lesson' is from Maya Angelou's poem, which I thought was a beautiful fit for this story.

The ball has started rolling on this little project. If there's anything you guys are curious about in the Hitchups AU universe, anything that was alluded to in that story or this one, just let me know in a review and I'll see about making a one-shot about it.

It was a bit of a mess being the introspection of an old man and all. I only wanted to hint at the situation the world was in and let your imaginations fill in the blanks; the same goes for the life Hiccup led. To be honest I wasn't very confident in it until I got some good feedback on DA.

So what do you think? Did it drag on too long? Too confusing? Where is Toothless?

P.S. If you're reading this and you have not read Hitchups: shame on you!

2. Protection

Protection

* * *

><p>Romania 1325 A.D.

* * *

><p>Hiccup did not move. He did not blink. He did not shudder at the cold or swallow the saliva gathering beneath his tongue.<p>

He hardly breathed.

Air trickled into his lungs at a slow and unsatisfying measure, so shallow it hurt, but he dared not deepen it. Instead he waitedâ€"waited as she circled him, her steps measured and mocking, baiting him to run, to move.

Running was pointless. She was faster than him. Stronger. She could kill him in an instantâ€"would_ kill himâ€"and at the slightest provocation. He had to _think_.

Gods, how he wanted to think. Thinking was what he _did_. It was his strength, his talent, his brawn. Outsmarting and conniving and escaping. A thousand tantalizing visions and plans circled his mind in shambles, but he could not seem to grasp enough to form any usable inspiration.

Then she leaned in.

Strigoi, the locals called themâ€"these dark predators of the night. He was warned against them; warned against the area. Warned of their allure and their cruelty. But the money was too good and his curiosity too potent and for _Odin's sake_ he wanted his bow back. So here he was.

Hiccup could see the sheet of dark hair resting over her shoulders, shoulders pale and smooth and inhumanly heady. He could smell the stale, cold dirt of graves. Fear paralyzed him like he had never experienced before, an unnatural fear she perfumed him in. Hiccup found himself unable to fight against her distraction, her proximityâ€"an allure so intoxicating that he could not shift even if he had intended it. What little air he stored in his lungs had left him in a slow pull, as if she sucked the breath right from his lips using those beautiful and sinister powers.

Her curved mouth fell to the hollow of his neck and Hiccup felt petrifiedâ€"literally petrifiedâ€"with legs that would not bend and a will that would not _awaken_.

The first cold touch of a fang grazed his neck and he thought: _T_his is it. It's over. What was left of his humanity would be taken..._

But no puncture occurred. His heart continued to beat and his lungs continued to hold. For a moment Hiccup thought time had stopped.

A dark shriek tore from the revenant creature's lips to pierce his ear and she flew away from him as though burned.

The spell had broken, not only by the sheer volume of her inhuman cry but also by distance. Hiccup stumbled back, an invisible support suddenly lost to him. The screams continued as he caught his footing, and these were screams not of pain or of sorrow, but tantrum.

No other word would fit.

Horror and bemusement settled over Hiccup as he watched the strigoi half-transform. Her skin grayed, her face fleshed in and out of cavityâ€”like she couldn't decide if she wanted to be dead or not. Her back curled and her spine popped and grew like a beast's before smoothing down beneath her dress again. Her eyes turned black, sclera and all, and her jaw unhinged and stretched to accommodate gargantuan fangs. She pulled on her hair and stomped her feet and screamed and screamed and screamed.

"_Alani!_"

The deep bark of a voice nearly threw the earlier terror back into Hiccup. A severe looking man stepped from the shadows but Hiccup knew better than to think him a simple human. He was too pale, his eyes too hollow, his presence too offsetting. As he moved forward in unreal fluidity, Hiccup could make out the red ring circling each pupil.

He felt like a deer in the presence of wolves.

Alani whirled on the newcomer, her hair flying behind her like a terrible cape.

"He's marked, Nikolai!" she snarled.

Nikolai's fine eyebrows lifted in his shock. "Pardon?"

"Mermaids!" Alani continued to cry and Hiccup turned back to her. She was ugly now; her appearance returned to human but her expression damaged any physical beauty. "Those devious, _selfish_â€”"

"You will calm yourself."

Hiccup gasped at the breath at his collar; air chilled by death raked through the fine hairs of his neck. He spun to find the new strigoi far too close to his personal space. The intent to escape had barely touched his mind when an iron grip had taken hold of Hiccup's arm, keeping him in place. He never detected movement from the other man.

The strigoiâ€”Nikolaiâ€”regarded something on the back of Hiccup's neck with a slightly troubled expression.

"Interesting," Nikolai said softly in his velveteen voice. "I have to wonder what it is a human male could have done to garner the protection of mermaids."

"Iâ€”" Hiccup's mind raced for an answer but, like his own body compared to these supernatural beings, it was too slow. He could feel the weight of the Aspen-wood stake the locals had given him beneath his clothes. It pressed against his belly, trapped within his belt. He longed to reach for it.

"You did not know?" Nikolai remarked. His featured had not moved from his initial, mild shock. "You belong to themâ€”one of their many treasuresâ€”so no other creature in this world could possibly claim ownership over you." He frowned as he spoke, looking wholly disappointed. Though nowhere near as disappointed as Alani, whose

face remained contorted in ugly anger.

Nikolai sighed as one would when told their favorite pastry was out of stock.

"Well, we cannot change him."

"But I _wanted_â€"

"We cannot change him," Nikolai repeated just as softly but somehow powerful enough to stop her speech. "We will have to dispose of him."

Hiccup was powerless. He could not so much as cry out in his defense. Every action he thought to take would be countered by a more logical part of his mind. His sluggish wits could not churn any bait. If only he could say something, reach for his daggerâ€

No. _'Not the knife,'_ the locals had said. _'You cannot kill the dead with something also dead.'_

He needed woodâ€something that was once alive. It was the stake that he wanted but the stake he could not grab. Not whilst he had that hypnotic power over him, caged within his own body.

A chorus of screams sounded in the distance, beyond the tall, double doors and thick gothic walls. These were not the screams of tantrums.

Both strigoi fell silent to raise their head and listen as hounds would in a hunt. Hiccup strained his own senses, curious and concerned, though relieved for the distraction.

The screams, Hiccup quickly realized, were not human. They were much like Alani's had been in their beastly tones, but these were grislier. Even with human ears he could sense more terror than rage.

A smile slowly built upon his face.

"No..." he whispered, his breath found again. His fingers twitched; the cold paralysis melted off of him with the weight of dropping chains.

"Ochiul Finala...?" Hiccup heard Nikolai murmur behind him. And then again, louder. "_Ochiul Finala!_"

Hiccup held up a finger. He could move again, he was thinking faster, and the strigoi were too enraptured by the sounds of their dying coven to pay any heed to his recovery.

"There is _one_ other who's claimed ownership over me."

The doors flew off in blue explosion. Wood and fire and stone flooded into the hall just before a Night Fury glided in on bat-like wings.

Alani reacted first. Her hair bristled and a hiss gathered in her throat but before she could do anything more Toothless fired a plasma bolt at her. The strigoi caught fire far too easily; her body

succumbed to the flame as it should have done in her first death.

Something had broken with her screamsâ€”the last of the power her kind had over Hiccup. Whether in their distraction or Toothless' nearness, full control returned to the man.

In a single, fluid movement Hiccup flicked the Aspen stake from his belt, spun, and drove it through Nikolai's heart. Nikolai was in the midst of a transformation for the strike and the shock of his appearance left Hiccup breathless.

The strigoi was half a foot taller, his nose enlarged and upturned, his teeth too big for his jaw, and his ears lengthened with curled tips. The breast of the creature had swelled and darkened, breaking from his shirt with cracking skin to make for a greater target. Hiccup could feel the bone and flesh give way beneath the wood. Thick, dead blood oozed around the broken skin like mud. The wound smoked and hissed before Nikolai's screech of agony drowned it out. The point where Hiccup stabbed began to cave inward and transform into ash. Fires flew up from within. They reached out from the mouth, the eyes, the heart and wherever else the skin gave away.

Hiccup wrenched the stake out and staggered away from the leaping flames as the strigoi died. Toothless trotted to his side and began to nose his wrists and chest in seek of damage.

_::Are you okay?:: _

Hiccups heart started to slow from its rapid drum. Numbness crept into his spine and tensed his shoulders as he acknowledged the near-death experience for what it was. Fires eating what was left of the corpses turned green and fizzled with a queer song. The smell of cooking, dead flesh rose into the air and turned his stomach. The smoke tickled his throat.

Hiccup gently pushed Toothless' snout away.

"I'm fine," he said gruffly. He'd have nightmares for weeks but his body remained intact this time around. "What took you so long?"

The time he spent among the undead seemed a lifetimeâ€”though it was more likely an illusion created by the entrapment.

Toothless' tail came up to smack Hiccup on the side of the head.

_::What took __**me**__ so long?:: _Toothless roared in outrage.
::Show a little self control next time!:

Hiccup rubbed his head and blushed because it had been _his_ mental weakness to the powers of strigoi that got them in this situation in the first place.

"I...that wasn'tâ€”there won't be a next time!"

::You're damn right there won't be!:

Hiccup gave a breathy laugh, which he quickly regretted as he started toward the smoke-filled halls from whence Toothless came.

"Are we going out the way we came in?" he coughed. He stepped around splinters and rubble and the burning piles of strigoi. The atmosphere started to sicken him, both the smell and the sights. He craved sunlight and the living.

::We must if you want your bow::

Hiccup snapped his head around to face Toothless. "Where is she?"

The strigoi had taken Framherja in their last encounter. Hiccup wasn't sure what they wanted with her or why, he was only certain that he had to get her back lest he fight with wooden stakes for the rest of his days. They had hoped to find her in the nearest coven but it seemed their search was meant to continue.

::The Councilor:: Toothless answered solemnly.

The Councilor. The regional ruler of the strigoi. A legend compared to Alani or Nikolai.

Hiccup glanced down at the stake in his hands; the grains of its tip were darkened by congealed blood but otherwise the weapon looked unharmed from piercing a strigoi. He was more shocked to see his hand whitened by the grip he had over the haft and willed it to loosen. Pain creaked within the joints.

"Alright," he said grimly. "I guess we have some more strogy-whatsits to kill."

::Try to keep your wits about you this time::

Hiccup threw the stake so that it bounced off Toothless' head with a harmless thud. The dragon curled a lip.

::Go pick that up::

Hiccup moved to do so, knowing he had no one to blame for the mess they were in but himself. It always came down to human weakness in the endâ€"for every misadventure that came to mindâ€"but it was a weakness he was learning to feel less ashamed of.

"Hey..." Hiccup began. The way his voice echoed around the cavernous walls startled him. The dying fires left the halls dimmer and cast jumping shadows to play tricks on his eyes. He quickly retrieved the stake and returned to Toothless' side. "What does it mean if I have a Mermaid's protection?"

Toothless regarded Hiccup with a critical eye.

::It means the Sisters liked you for whatever reason:: he said.

Hiccup rubbed the back of his neck. It was his neck that threw the strigoi from himâ€"not the scars on his lips from where Marmara bit him but the four pricks to his neck where her claws pierced him. The memory returned to him as his fingers traced the raised skin: Marmara had transformed as Alani had. She had revealed the darker side, the dangerous side that she had once held at bay for his sake.

And yet, he had returned to the cavern since then...

He often feared for his safety when around the Sisters, but never for his life.

"But why did they say I belonged to the mermaids?" Hiccup persisted. Toothless had to know. The dragon could always smell things or sense things he couldn'tâ€like when a woman was in the early stages of a pregnancy or when basic objects held enchantments.

Toothless shook his saddled shoulders with impatience. _::Are we flying out of here or not?::_

Hiccup narrowed his eyes. "Did you know this? Do you know what they were talking about?"

::...:

"Toothless!"

::It's not my fault you areâ€what's the human term?â€Easy?::

"_Excuse me_" Hiccup gasped, certain that he had heard wrong. "You don't even know what that means!"

::You're right, that wasn't the word I was looking for. You're a fish's boy-toy?::

Hiccup reeled back. "I am not!"

::A pet human?::

"TOOTHLESS!"

* * *

><p>AN:**

Recap: Toothless had a Big Damn Hero moment. I brought in a tribute to the mermaids and some mythology. I added the time/place up at the top to give you guys a general idea of what's going down.

**Strigoi **are Vampires. The real kind. Not the bedazzled mannequins taking over that genre. I want to keep the era and location in line for the terms used.

**Ochiul Finala** is Russian (I think, it's been a while) for "Last Eye"â€because when a Night Fury hunts only its eyes are visible, and they're the last thing you see :D

Just a refresher for those who haven't read Hiccup's in eons: Toothless uses human words, human expressions, and human contractionsâ€he doesn't speak as a dragon would speak and it's all because of Hiccup's influence, more now than ever after such strong exposure to the boy.

And now I give a ****huge thank you**** to you guys! I seriously, seriously, did not expect so many people to remember this vague promise. I expected less to like it as much as they did. So THANK YOU! I luff you!

So what do you think? Boo vampires? Yay vampires? Gross vampires? Any other mythologies you guys are interested in?

3. Celebration

****Celebration****

* * *

><p>Pre-Hitchups: Missing movie scene

* * *

><p>Something was amiss in the village of Berk. Hiccup knew this even before he crossed the threshold of the forest for no deep, bawling voices carried in the winds to greet him as per usual. His first steps into the village revealed darkened doorways and unattended sheep. No one pushed creaking wagons along the grassy knolls or hammered amidst raid repairs. No one turned to give him an appraising stare for emerging from the forest yet again.

Hiccup continued on, more wary than usual. He snuck around Old Slipshod's farmhouse and tiptoed beyond the usual back paths, hoping, as he always hoped in such moments, not to be noticed. He showed greater vigilance towards the covert travels between his house and the cove with every passing day, and on a day such as thisâ€"when the usual hubbub of village life was suspiciously absentâ€"he had to be cautious.

But Hiccup found it hard to keep vigilant this particular evening when all he wanted to do was jump and dance and turn around and run right back to Toothless so they could fly some more.

He had flown. He tasted air unbreathed by man before and felt winds no sails would ever ride. It was exhausting and exhilarating, frightening and fantastic, and absolutely, inexplicably, unnaturally natural. For the first time in Hiccup's young life, he felt like he belonged somewhereâ€"like he was meant to be exactly where there: a hundred faÃmr above the ground.

A dull ruckus drifted from the center of the village and it pulled Hiccup from his remembrance. The first sign of community life demanded that he keep his wits. If Hiccup's ears heard correctly, he'd say the entire village had gathered to one spot on the island.

Curious, the boy altered his course. He still kept his guard up and his eyes sweeping for movement, unable to relax his caution even when this far from the forest's suspicious parameter. And it was not only because of Astrid's troublesome interest in him, but his father would return any day now andâ€"

Hiccup's face slackened, his feet stumbled to a stop and his eyes riveted on Hooligan Harbor. None other than his father's ship bobbed

among the line up in the sun's fading rays. He knew he was not mistaken; the ship was obvious in its damaged stateâ€"torn sails, cracked masts, and chunks missing from the hull as though bitten by a very large jaw.

But most worrisome was that only one had returned. Only one, when they had sent out so many...

"THERE YEH ARE!"

Hiccup screamedâ€"no other word could be used to describe the high noise that tore from his throat. He turned, his hand fisting the fabric above his heart.

Gobber, in all his heavysset, off-balanced glory, had somehow managed to sneak up on his apprentice. The blacksmith had been drinking; his cheeks were ruddy with the very tip of his nose and ears a bright red. He hobbled over to Hiccup, his mug-appendage secured and sloshing pale amber with every limp.

"Hey Gobberâ€" Hiccup greeted nervously once his heart had slid from his throat back into his chest.

"Where th' devil have yeh bin, boy?" Gobber inquired loudly, and without waiting for an answer said, "Never mind, never mind! Whit matters is that yeh get tae make an appearance at yer party no matter how late. Come alongâ€"

Gobber's intact arm encircled Hiccup's shoulders, herding the boy towards the now identifiable mesh of laughter and music.

"A p-party?" Hiccup's eyes followed the dotted trail of spilled drink up to the Meade Hall, where the doors were open and warm light spilled into the birth of twilight. "For what?"

"Fer _you_. Didn't I just say that?"

A curdled weight settled at the very base of Hiccup's stomach.

"Why?" he croaked out, but he already knew. He knew what the village thought of him now, and he hated it a little more each day.

Gobber didn't answer. Instead he called into the distance of their direction: "Here he is you lot!"

Hiccup tried to squirm from the large man's grip when he saw the oncoming crew bounding down the uneven rock steps.

"Gobber," he pushed at the wide belly, "reallyâ€"this isn'tâ€"

He didn't want _this_: all this undeserved attention. He thought he didâ€"he _once_ didâ€"but now...

"Yer classmates have bin waitin' fer yeh," Gobber continued in that overly boisterous voice. He hugged Hiccup closer in what Hiccup assumed was an act of appreciation, but it only ended in spilling mead on his shoulder.

"Gobber," Hiccup grunted in his continued effort to dislodge the arm.

"Gobber letâ€"

Gobber let go. For one shining moment Hiccup believed it to be a feat of his own strength. But then he found himself surrounded by the other trainees, and his face fell for the second time that night. There truly was no escape.

The twins pounced on him first.

"Where have you been?" Tuffnut shouted in his ear. His breath was rank with sweet alcohol. Hiccup couldn't answer even if he had thought of a suitable excuse; he had been jerked in another direction, the entirety of his left arm caught in a vice by Ruffnut.

"Yeah, where do you _go_?" Snotlout asked, crossing his arms. "I had to look for you for_ever_. And I searched under the docks."

Again, Hiccup had no chance to answer, as Ruffnut had taken to hauling him up the steps she just descended from. His legs felt leaden, stumbling with the moveâ€"a subconscious act of defiance, perhaps.

Ruffnut hardly seemed fazed by his resistance.

"Why are you wet?" she asked. Her nose wrinkled as she examined the hair plastered to his temples and the damp ring around his collar. Hiccup opened his mouth, but he didn't think admitting to washing the remains of dragon fire from his hair would help his situation.

"Iâ€"I was just...washing up," he answered, dully.

"Were you training?" Fishlegs blurted the question as he huffed, trying to keep up with Ruffnut's fast pace. The girl's hold on him was iron, and she continued to drag Hiccup up the steps to the Meade Hall like he was nothing more than an empty scabbard. Hiccup could no longer feel his littlest finger and he quickly lost sensation in the next one.

He pretended he didn't hear the question as they leveled out before the Hall's entrance.

Snotlout jogged to the front of their fast moving group in time to lead them into the Meade Hall and his gait took on an air of importance. The noise and heat of a hundred partying Vikings assaulted Hiccup nearly as powerfully as Gobber had just moments ago. Smoke from so many torches had created a hazy atmosphere and Hiccup felt sticky just looking at the dribbled mead staining tunics and beards.

A thick hand patted Hiccup's shoulder. Gobber started to say something about taking Hiccup to see Stoick but Winifred the Wiggly passed by in the next moment and the impaired man followed.

The teens continued to move into the crowd, taking Hiccup with them, and paying no heed to Gobber's inattention. A few faces turned towards them and brightened upon seeing Hiccup. Mugs were raised in his direction; greetings shouted in the only volume a Viking knew how to address someone.

Hiccup could not see his father, but he saw Spitelout and Phlegma clanking pints, no doubt starting another one of their heinous bets. He saw Glume and Axel, arm-in-arm, laughing, and Kernella and Thorst spiting swears at one another.

One voice—though disembodied—stood out above the rest to him.

"I _knew_ it, yeh see!" Stoick's bellow carried beyond the walls of the Meade Hall, his boasts reaching the shores of Bashem for sure. "He's th' offspring of me 'n' Val! Never really worried myself over it—just a bit of a late bloomer, that's all!"

Hiccup ducked away. A shame he couldn't quite understand had taken hold of him, leaving his conscience so shaken that he didn't care where Ruffnut guided him. He only knew he was not ready to face his father. He was not ready to received undeserved praise from _that_ particular Viking.

"Hey Astrid!" Snotlout exclaimed jubilantly.

Hiccup decided that he _might_ _care_ where Ruffnut led him.

They arrived at one of the tables. The immediate spaces around Astrid were unoccupied, places held by unmanned drinks, which told Hiccup the others were seated here before and only left to find him. Astrid looked bored and more annoyed than usual. Her fingers drummed against the metal of her tankard. Hiccup had a sinking feeling her mood had much to do with the nonsense of this party being for _him_.

Ruffnut pointedly sat Hiccup on the other end of the table from Astrid, for which he was thankful; Astrid sent him such a scathing look upon spotting him that he thought she might attack him should he come any closer.

"We found him," Snotlout went on. "It took a while, because he was off doing that secret thing you can't really figure out—"

"Technically it was Gobber who found him," Fishlegs interjected, happily saving Snotlout from digging himself into an unseen grave. Hiccup gave Astrid one of his signature nervous smiles, which went coldly unreturned. Fishlegs turned to rest his weight on his forearm. "But you never told us what you were doing. Seriously, Hiccup, no one could find you for half the day."

"Yeah, Hiccup," Astrid said, her face pointed and shrewd. "What _were_ you doing?"

"I..."

Flying, he wanted to say. _Reaching heights_ Vikings had never dared hope to reach_. He wanted to tell someone, gush about it, even, but he had no one. People crushed in around him, Ruffnut had her arm slung around his shoulders, his peers showered him with so much attention that it made his head spin—and in the midst of receiving everything he'd dreamed of from the shop's window, a profound sensation of melancholy crushed his heart. The truth of his isolation suffocated him.

He didn't know these people, just as they didn't know him. For the first time in his life, Hiccup was forced to admit that he was a stranger in his own village. He had no confidante among these people with whom he had spent his entire life. He could not trust them. Not with his secrets and not with the truth.

He could never trust them.

Hiccup felt cold; the noise of a hundred shouting Vikings fell away to a buzz. He wanted to be back in the cove right now. He wanted to go back to Toothless—"Toothless, with whom he could share everything. His best friend.

"...and then I was like, '_my fingers can squeeze off your fingers'_ and he was all like, '_my snap is more powerful than your snap'_ _so we started snapping at each other really_ hard, _ya' know? And obviously he backed off..."

Hiccup blinked at the decidedly odd story Snotlout regaled their table with. He must have zoned out for too long because the attention had shifted away from him, with Tuffnut listening to his friend in rapt attention and Fishlegs frowning at the lack of credibility that Snotlout's story surely entailed.

He noticed Astrid glowering at him, likely because he never answered her question, and just as likely because she really seemed to _hate_ him as the weeks went by. He would almost prefer being ignored by her again than continue to have her look at him with such hostility, especially when some sick part of him he could hardly control continued to ache for her approval.

"Don't mind her." Ruffnut leaned an elbow on the table, which helped to block the other girl from sight. "She's just sore because she's second for the first time in forever."

Ruffnut had that dreamy smile on her face again as she gazed into his eyes, but there lie a hint of satisfaction, perhaps even gratitude. She had always seemed so caught up in competing with her twin; never before did it occur to Hiccup that Ruffnut saw Astrid—"the only other shieldmaiden-in-training of their class"—as a rival.

"So how do you do it?" Ruffnut asked. Her voice had lowered to an excited whisper. She leaned forward as if waiting for him to reveal a childish secret.

"Look," Hiccup sighed, thinking he at least owed her _some_ sort of explanation since the last thing he wanted was undeserved admiration, "I'm not some dragon-fighting prodigy, alright? I'm nothing like you think I am. They're all just flukes. _She's_ still the best fighter."

He jerked his head toward the braided blonde on the other end of the table, aware of her glare and unwilling to risk meeting it.

"Whatever," Ruffnut blew off. She sat up some, annoyed at having Astrid brought into the conversation so positively despite her efforts to block her out. "I don't care _how_ you do it. It's _what_ you do, _when_ you're doing it."

Hiccup sat back as well. He didn't understand.

"Huh?"

"How do you have the guts to risk yourself like that?"

"Er...what?"

Ruffnut's smile turned wistful as she played with one of her short braids. She leaned forward so much that Hiccup had to scoot along the bench to keep her from breaching his personal space.

"I've been watching you," Ruffnut said with her voice falling to a strangely sensual husk. "You close your eyes when the dragons charge you. Sometimes you drop your weapon. You approach them barehanded. You touch them. You do everything that should get you killed and you don'tâ€"you survive."

She drew in a shuddering breath, her lips curling at whatever she currently pictured in that terrifying imagination of hers.

"I..."

Hiccup's voice seemed to have failed him, as did the reason for Ruffnut's fur vest to suddenly not be on her shoulders. When had that happened? He only noticed because her shoulders curved inward as she pressed her advantage. He could see how smoothed they looked, softer than he thought anything on her could be and with freckles a shade lighter than his own...

Ruffnut leaned in closer and Hiccup realized he ran out of bench to shuffle back on.

"I like that you have the guts to do that in the first place," she said, her voice going softer and softer. "I never knew you had a taste for risks before."

There was nothing but the space between their faces left for her to cross. Hiccup swallowed with great difficulty. He must have forgotten to breathe for a while because he felt dizzy and unable to think. His eyes and body were not obeying him, for if they were he surely would have gotten up and looked anywhere but her lips.

She was going to kiss him. Her eyes had closed, her breath had stilled, her long, slender neck stretched out with the intent to bring their mouths together, and Hiccup just sat there, frozen.

Well, he thought with an air of defeat, Ruffnut was pretty enough._

And he was long overdue for his first kissâ€"one that wasn't from a demanding and inquisitive seven-year-old Camicazi (because she was a Bog and his father told him that they should not even be counted as women for all their barbaric tendencies).

"Hey gorgon!" Tuffnut yanked Ruffnut's hair back and her lips jerked away from Hiccup's before they ever made contact. Suddenly, Hiccup

could move again; he could breathe and think again.

"Tuff!" Ruffnut shrieked. All her feminine wiles fled from her body language. She leapt off the bench like a crazed Terror and shot after her brother. Tuffnut managed to give Hiccup a subtle thumbs-up before he turned tail and disappeared into the thick press of large bodies.

Hiccup remained unmoving for a moment longer with no idea of what he should feel. Largely relieved, in control, perhaps a tiny-bit disappointed... seriously confused about Ruffnut's sincerity...even more so about her reasoning.

Maybe a bit more than a tiny-bit disappointed...

With a start, Hiccup realized that Fishlegs and Snotlout were gone, as were their drinks, and all those mixed, shallow feelings suddenly dissolved. A re-fill run was underway, which left only two at their table.

Astrid curled her lip, looking at him like he seduced Ruffnut into trying to kiss him.

Was she blind? Clearly he was the innocent party!

"Ruffnut brought up some good pointsâ€" Astrid said in a casual, easy-going voice that offset the heavy mistrust of her features. Hiccup was more surprised that she could hear them in the first place given the surrounding ruckus. "You do a lot of things that should get you killed, but it doesn't..."

Hiccup shrugged and tried to look innocent. His face felt very hot all of a sudden and he got the distinct impression it was obvious to everyone in the room. He knew he should be more concerned by Astrid and her prying but his mind insisted on clinging to the recent reception of female affection.

Had Ruffnut really been interested because of his daring and not because of the results? Had she been more interested in the guy who idiotically threw himself into danger rather than some dragon-whisperer? Giving it a second thought, Hiccup concluded that it seemed far more fitting for her crazy character than a misled infatuation for prowess.

Would that make it okay to let her kiss him?

"It doesn't," Astrid continued slowly. Hiccup started, thinking she had somehow gleaned his thoughts by sheer, intense staring. "It doesn't get you killed because you know it won'tâ€" "

Oh yes, his kill ring success.

"What? No, Iâ€" His words jerked to a stop as quickly as they fled his mouth. How could he tell her it was the most terrifying part of every training session? Trying a new thing he learned from Toothless, facing the unknown, testing how far diversities stretched in dragons...

"You know things we don't," Astrid went on in that pace that told Hiccup the cogs were turning in her head, that she was piecing this

together _now_. "Is someone telling you how to disarm dragons?"

"That'sâ€" He took in a breath. He found her gaze unnerving. "That's notâ€"

"Is someone helping you prevent us from harming them? Because you don't. You never hurt them. You haven't hurt a single one."

Hiccup stilled. The accusation in her tone spoke volumes to him. She thought his methods as shamefully merciful towards an enemy.

"It's not our way," she said, sitting back in her chair. "You might have everyone else fooled, but I'm not buying this 'secret prodigy' thing you have going on."

"I'm not a prodigy," Hiccup said quietlyâ€"_desperately_â€"because he wanted her to believe him. "I'm just...I'm trying something new."

Astrid looked just as frustrated as he felt.

"We're not going to win the war by subduing them," she said. "They're not going to stop killing us just because we stand there and close our eyes. The only good dragon is a dead oneâ€"and until it's proven otherwise I suggest you start taking protecting our village seriously and stop...and stop playing around."

With his thoughts on Toothless, a hot flush of anger reared within Hiccup. He felt anger towards _her_, for being so _Viking_. But he was too afraid of accidentally confronting her, in spurring her into taking this conversation to a more public level, so he turned his scowl to the table.

'You have no idea,' he wanted to say to her. _'Stop preaching about things you don't understand, things you've never bothered to question before.'_

Gods, how he hated the way she made his stomach twist in on itself. She would be the last person he could trust, because she would be the first person to turn on him. If _she_ ever knew...

"I _will_ find out."

Hiccup gasped. His head snapped up to find her standing above him.

Looking up into her faceâ€"the shaded lighting sharpening her features, her jaw set in determination, her eyes cold with promiseâ€"Hiccup knew she was right. Someday, possibly someday soon, someone _would_ find out. This charade could not go on forever.

Hiccup followed her cue and got up as well. He didn't stay to further trade words with her and he didn't bother to try and coax her into a mind frame of accepting dragons as something other than axe-fodder. Without another word he turned his back to her and walked from the Hall. No one stopped him, though a few did call out to him. It all went ignored as his feet mechanically brought him to the one place in Berk he considered safe: his cozy corner in Gobber's

workshop.

* * *

><p>#####

A/N: Missing movie scene! This was initially written as a spur-of-the-moment prompt for the movie line: **"The village is throwing a party to celebrate!"**

I have some By the Toe ideals in the Ruffnut interactions. That's honestly how I think her mental processes when during that whole See You Tomorrow Montage. She's in it for the crazies, ya'll.

Thanks to **Gumdropboo** for looking over this and helping with contextual edits (and some grammar). And, naturally, thank you **all**, so, so much for the reviews and the suggestions. I love hearing your ideas. Let me know how you found this chapter. Remember, this is a Missing Movie Scene that occurred before the Hitchups deviation, it's meant to fit in both worlds.

4. Selfish

Selfish

Warning: mature content below

* * *

><p>Miklagard, Rule of Empress Zoe Porphyrogenita

* * *

><p>He was terrified. Unnerved and tense.<p>

He only drank enough to be into the kissing. Kissing, she had shown him. Kissing, he could share control in. He kissed her against buildings, against the walls of the palace and frames of doors. He kissed her and kissed her in an effort to drown out his own awarenessâ€"a failing endeavor as she nudged him towards their destination.

By the time she got him to his room some of the lust in his eyes cleared. They darted to the bed with growing apprehension, his movements becoming stiffer, some of the warmth leaving his hands. He knew this was coming, he knew the moment he took her offer and allowed her to pull him from his seat.

He didn't know if he was ready.

She kept his mouth occupied as she loosened his belt, kept positioning his hands on her body anytime they tried to impede the tugs on his tunic. She wouldn't let him turn her awayâ€"not when she had gotten this far.

A part of her felt badâ€"his hands trembled against her hips and his shoulders hunched inwards when she exposed his torso to the window's

moonlight. Shame, insecurities...she preyed on them. Many would argue that she took advantage of him, of his youth and innocence and inexperience, and they would be right. This may have been the worst thing she had ever done, this purely selfish perusal of him that had nothing to do with his fame or his dragon. He was refreshing. Everything he did stunned her, from his bashful, questioning glances to his bared need for human touch.

Maybe she simply convinced herself that he needed this because she needed this, because it had been so long since she felt like a woman and not like an object.

She nudged him onto bed when just his loose trousers remained. Only then did she step back; only then did she allow him to regain some sense from her distractions. He wouldn't run or turn away, not as she removed her clothes in front of him, polished fingers making quick work of her robe. The garment fell around her feet in a dramatic sweep.

She'd never forget the way his gaze felt on her body, like a hot bath on stiff muscles. No expectation colored those eyesâ€"they didn't look at her figure as though she were born to be a source of pleasure. Curiosity alighted his features, corrosive only to that crippling apprehension. Pure, sincere admiration gleamed in the parting of his lips and the fall of his brow as if she were a piece of art.

He likely only saw her as such because, as far as he knew, seeing a woman's body was the best partâ€"a piece of that innocent charm that attracted her to him. And, like a Northman faced with a church of timeless architecture, she was about to destroy it.

She joined him on the bed and guided his handsâ€"rough and long, but so young. His hesitation went unchecked, completely open with his fear. He may have been frightened of hurting her or afraid of being judged; she found no false bravado in the constant wetting of his lips or faltering caresses. He wanted her guidance. He needed it. The lost looks he sent her ignited compulsions that could only be described as nurturing.

She was patient in teaching him how to explore her body, and coaxing as she convinced him to allow her the same privilege. The heat of his skin heightened when she fully exposed him, finally tossing his trousers from the bed, and she had to spend another moment reassuring him with kisses and foreign whispers. Her hands wrapped around him, gently working him out of his skin. He shuddered, and she knew no other woman had touched him like this.

She would never forget the way he bit his lip as he entered her, continually glancing up to make sure he hadn't done anything wrong. He settled himself fully into her and in all her partners never had she seen such naked rapture, like he could not believe this was actually happening. He mimicked first before ever taking initiativeâ€"she noted that with the kissingâ€"so she gripped his backside and guided him into a rhythm.

He didn't last long; she knew he wouldn't despite her limited experience with first-timers. Several thrusts in and he started to shudder. She shushed his soft bleats and apologies. He leaned his head on her collarbone, hips still working, desperately trying to

obey the grip of her hands.

Ã%g...

It's okay.

Ã%g held ekki...

It's fine.

She whispered for him to let go, tasting the skin of his brow, the salt of his restraint. He didâ€"because in that moment no language barrier existed.

He sagged against her, still shaking, breath ghosting along her breast. She held him to her, her hands trailing his back. She kissed his hair.

It would have gone more smoothly had she been on topâ€"had she taken just a smidgen more controlâ€"but it wasn't appropriate. That was for another time. Nothing about this night was worth changing. Not for him, not for herself.

Awareness returned to him; he pulled himself out of her and rolled to her side with a sigh. He muttered something in Norse, hardly understandable given the hand over his face and the exhaustion evident in his lax body.

She lifted away from the pillow and patted his cheek.

Not yet, _Hikstaki mou._

She wouldn't let him sleep. There was still much to be done in the night. He had to know how much _more_ _there_ was. She wanted to teach him, because she knew he'd remember. She knew he'd _listen_â€"listen to her actions and breath and carnal noises that no language could recreate.

She worked him back up with experience hands, batting off the appeal of sleep. She would make this workâ€"whatever _this_ was.

Tonight she wasn't a courtesan. She wasn't a wasted, used, disgraced wife. She was a woman...and she would make him a man.

Her man.

* * *

><p>#####

A/N: And like the ol' one-two, here's another chapter within a week. I know it's more detail than I usually put on ffnet for sexy-times, but I thought I kept it low key enough. Plus it's super short.

Man, this almost makes me miss those Miklagard days.

Please tell me you all know who the female speaker is. I will slap

whoever does not with a cold fish.

Thanks again you guys for reading and enjoying these! Please let me know what you think! :3

5. Oblation

****Oblation****

Two figures marched across the Tundra's horizon, one dark and long and sleek, the other wobbling to balance against ground's heavy grip and the stinging winds. Nature won out for the seventh time as the man was knocked to his side, a string of curses falling from his mouth.

"I miss the sun."

The Night Fury ignored his human and continued to paw through the snow.

"I miss feeling my hands too."

Toothless favored Hiccup with a humorless look.

_:I __**warned**__ you about the cold...:_

Hiccup had gotten to ride his shoulders for much of their journey, but as soon as they neared his Drove's territory Toothless had forced the human to start walking. Much like how Hiccup was nervous about exposing a dragon to his clansmen, Toothless had his own reservations about flaunting a rider.

Hiccup stuck out his lip and exhaled noisily. "I know..."

He would be fine; Toothless knew what happened to humans when over-exposed to coldness and Hiccup showed none of the signs. Complaints aside, his human fared rather well for travelling so far north. The sealskin purchased from the nearest human village kept his back warm while that ghastly beard they spent _moons_ arguing over shielded his face. Hiccup passed his sleeping hours in the same village, often cradled by Toothless' wings and pressed against his fire cavity; it always managed to thaw any chill the human suffered during wakefulness.

A part of Toothless suspected the bond between them shared a part in Hiccup's comfort, as though his warming, internal flame could somehow spread to Hiccup.

"Are we almost there yet?" Hiccup trudged forward in a high-kneed march just to conquer the heavy snow.

_:We __**are**__ there:_

Hiccup stumbled over a hard patch of ice.

"We _are_?"

He squinted ahead into the dark sky. The airborne Night Furies turned invisible against the night backdrop, but those grounded emerged as

dozens of moving black mounds against a blue-white terrain. Their eyes shone like lanterns; pairs of green, yellow and sometimes white bobbed closer. It was beautiful and eerie and it never ceased to enchant Hiccup, the way Night Furies commanded the night.

Toothless nudged the small of Hiccup's back with his crown to get the boy moving again. He could sense the attention they were drawingâ€”the attention they always drew.

The first meeting was awkward. His drove, thinking him dead and lost, were suspicious of his appearance and more so of his companion. The Blue Ones hadn't recognized Hiccup as a human for his paler color; the only humans they had been exposed to were rounded figures cloaked in furs with dark, wide faces. The Grey Ones argued over Hiccup's presence, claiming omens of good and bad came with him. Some of the Black Ones had the gall to suggest eating Hiccup.

The queerness of his tailfin and the saddle on his back sparked looks of damning and curiosity. It was his heroic story of defeating the Demon that saved Toothless' pride (and perhaps Hiccup's life). His family of countless Spells gathered at the height of the moon, prepared to judge Toothless as redeemable or notâ€”for reliance on a human was nothing to smile uponâ€”and that's when he revealed his tale. He admitted his weakness and enslavement, he spoke of his shame and unlikely rescue, he confessed his madness and daring in befriending a human.

Then he spoke of his slow climb to salvation...and it had seemed slow. Toothless would blame it on his connection with Hiccup, the way his mind would embrace experiences more than his senses would pick up his surroundings, but those two human years he spent travelling with Hiccup felt a lifetime next to his decades of enslavement.

The tale had captured the attention, scrutiny, and finally respect of the Drove. The Grey Ones bumped heads with him first, reinstating him as one of the drove. Then his brothers and sisters cameâ€”those that had survived huntings and primary. Only then, when he had the approval of the entire, did he allow Hiccup forward.

But the welcome of three days ago was not what Toothless had imagined for years and years (though in hindsight it should have been). It was this momentâ€”right now. The reunion with this Night Fury, the one advancing in silent footfalls. Her scent invaded his nostrils before he even thought to look at her; it triggered an onslaught of memories and reactions. A shudder ran through Toothless' body and for a beat he swore he could feel the cold as a mammal would.

Toothless turned his head and looked at her.

Pale, yellow eyes gleamed back at him in the darkness. He had dreamed of those eyesâ€”more so in his lucid moments away from the Demon, but they were always there niggling his mind, all throughout his enslavement. He wondered about them, wondered if they would narrow in revulsion or brighten in esteem upon remembering him.

::Go play with the Blue Ones:: he demanded of Hiccup in his lowest, most subtle tenor.

"Huh?" Hiccup mumbled, looking up from his feet. His wide pupils sucked in the starlight above and he focused on the dark shadow

moving slowly towards them.

::They're behind you. Up the hill::

Hatchlings weren't hard to find in the midst of a Resting Spell. The shade of their scales and their restless movements could catch any light.

Hiccup didn't move as Toothless wished him to; he continued to squint at the approaching dragoness.

"Who's that?"

_::Hiccup...:: _Toothless warned. He lowered his voice and earplates as much as he dared. _::It's the
__**female**__â€”::_

"Theâ€”_ooh..._" Hiccup took a step backwards; his foot crunched rather loudly for someone whose weight could not compare to a dragon's. "_Right..._"

The human had that annoying, sly look on his face like he actually knew what was going on. Or it could have been the beard that annoyed Toothless.

He smashed his tail against the cold-crusting snow, agitated that Hiccup continued to linger. His impertinent human threw up his hands and chuckled.

"Going, going..."

Hiccup started clopping his way toward a cluster of bright blue hatchlings. The clutch began chirping in excitement the moment they saw the Pale-Human-Who-Knew-Where-To-Scratch.

With his human out of range, Toothless allowed himself to relax a little. Females were dangerous. And this one...

He turned his attention on her again. The moon only half shone that night but it was enough to power the flare of her gaze and gloss her hard coat in a healthy sheen. Her scales were a shine lighter than hisâ€”bluerâ€”and he could tell by her tailfins that her wingspan was longer. She faced him straight legged, mirroring his stance, and their heads were nearly of equal height.

Odd. He recalled her as being much larger in comparison in their last meeting.

She made the same observation.

::Your girth has expanded:: _she rasped, low and thick. Toothless tried to keep his tail from twitching in reaction to the strength in her voice; her fire must burn hot to vocalize such a grated timbre.

He focused on roughening his own voice.

_::Ah...yes. My maturing has accelerated because I...:: _Toothless couldn't be sure why he hesitated. Perhaps it was because Hiccup hesitated when asked such questions. He pushed through. _:: Because

I'm bonded to a human::_

Her nostril's flared, inhaling the fresh scent Hiccup left in his wake.

:And such things happen when one chooses to connect with a human?::

There was something in the way she said "choose" and "connect"... something questioning, bordering on degrading. Something shared by many of his age.

Toothless thrust out his chest and declared, _::Just__** this**__ human::_

His human was special. Ground any dragon who said different.

The female regarded him coolly but she made no remark to his comment. Instead, she noted, _ ::Your speech has altered::_

Toothless, in return, chose not to comment on _this_. It had been pointed out to him time and again by other dragons. _He_ couldn't hear it but somehow he was picking up human dialect and he didn't know how to stop.

_:Where is __**He?:**_ Toothless asked. His drovebrother should have been the first to bump heads with him but his rival had yet to show his scales.

The very female they had once competed for sat on her haunches and curled her tail to her front.

:He brought me three heads of a hydra:: She sounded as though she were boasting for him, _::I found it worthy of selection. Then we engaged in primary for a moon's journey across the sky. He fought strongly and gave me many scars::_ She lifted her maw as she said this. Toothless saw cracked scales and a thin line of grey raking down her throat and chest, dangerously close to the life streams of their bodies. It must have been a glorious primary. He would have expected no less from his drovebrother.

Which was why it did not surprise Toothless when the female finished with:_ ::And then I killed him::_

Toothless lowered his earfins out of respect. _::He is with Ea now::_

:His Vale was great and he had Good Passing:: she added. _::It was many Spells ago::_

Many Spells ago...

Toothless tempered his voice when he asked, _::And so you are not beyond primary?::_

The female snorted, his intentions all too clear, and replied, _::You are handicapped.::_

Toothless had desensitized himself enough to let the statement slide harmlessly from his scales.

::And yet I fly::

::You travel with a human:: _

::You think that lessens my stature?:: _He bared his teeth with the question. He was still healthy and capable and his companion did not dilute that.

::You were enslaved:: she stated again but this time her coolness had softened as did her voice.

Toothless snarled anyhow. He sensed several nearby TatqiqKivgaq tap into their conversation.

::And then I killed her:: he announced so guttural a _human _could have understood him. When he spoke of the demon, of the thousands she had enslaved, and how _he_ had defeated her, he and his human companion, the drove as a whole bowed their heads in acknowledgement.

The female stared at him for a very long moment. Then her head dipped to reaffirm her recognition of his victory.

::I wished your drovebrother to defeat me:: she confessed. _::I would rather not wait until my scales fade with age and weakness to bear clutch::_

Toothless' right earfin twitched. He made sure to leave out the human slang when he next said, _::I would bring you oblation of my greatest defeat...but I cannot carry it::_

The female padded forward with snow sinking under her paws in quiet submission until he could feel the heats of their chambers intermingle in the small space between them.

::Shame of serpents:: she purred and she bumped her crown to his.

The contact shocked the breath from him. He could feel his gas chamber churning in his breast, swearing that he would meet no stronger female.

Toothless stared at her for a very long time. She did not blink. She did not turn away.

::Hiccup!:: he barked back towards his human. He never took his eyes from Her though. He never stopped seeking sincerity.

"What?" The mound on the ground called back. Hiccup had at least three hatchlings crawling along his skins as ants would a tree. A forth chewed at his shoe.

::We're going back south:: Toothless said.

Hiccup sat up quickly. One of the hatchlings fell from his chest and landed in his lap.

"What?" he repeated, dumbly.

::We're taking the largest piece of the demon back here with us::

Toothless could hear Hiccup scrambling to stand up under the weight of hatchlings and snow.

"Oh...that sounds...really, really difficult."

:: But we'll still do it::

"Is this for_ her_?"

Toothless continued to watch Her. Her eyes gleaned in the reflective snows and speckled under the stars. Her youth and power and strength sang to him.

::Yes::

Hiccup plucked a hatchling from his sealskin and set it back on the ground.

"Then I guess that's what we'll be doing."

* * *

><p>AN: **And we're back with the bros! I think this was the last one I had on DA, so that means it'll just be fresh material from here on out. I _have_ been a bit distracted lately from RL and a slight Spartacus obsession but I'll try to be more on the ball with this.

I've **re-uploaded** the final chapters of Hitchups with a little snippet of unseen **WaH** story tagged onto the bottom. If you want to read Hiccup's first impression with Toothless' Drove go check it out :)

A big thanks to **Sir Nick** for betaing! Let me know what ya'll think. The female Night Fury may have come off as a bit harsh but dragon culture is quite different from human culture. Everything about her is appealing to Toothless.

Baby Night Furies crawling all over Hiccup FTW.

6. A Viking in New Rome

**When a man is cursed with the impossible combination of immortality and humanity, sooner or later he's going to run into a few demigods.**

* * *

><p>"WEAPONS!"

Percy cringed. He froze mid-step with his foot hovering inches over the Pomerian Line circling New Rome's city.

Terminus had literally just materialized in front of him in a sudden,

sulfurous pop of yellow smoke that left the demigod's lungs burning. The statue looked much like he always did: armless, stone curls wound tight against his head, and a disapproving scowl on his face.

Percy gingerly put his weight back outside the city safe zone.

"Sorry," he muttered and immediately reached into his pocket for Riptide. He could hear Frank and Hazel rustle behind him for their own weapons. Percy cast an apologetic look back to the man they were supposed to be escorting into the city and gestured with a nod that he should do the same.

The giant, golden bow he wore around his back would definitely not be allowed.

"Julia!" Terminus called out. "Where is that errant child...?"

Julia darted out from a cluster of carvings opposite to where Terminus was scanning and stood at attention. She still wore her hair in pigtails but she seemed to have grown an inch since Percy last saw her.

Terminus faced forward. "Ah, there you are! In the bin nowâ€"all of you. You know the rules."

The statue scrutinized them as they unloaded their weapons, one by one. Percy dropped Riptide next to a set of brass knuckles and smiled at Julia, who returned the gesture with an impish giggle. All of her teeth had come in since he last saw her.

"I should have known the 'rule flouter' would forget," Terminus droned on, "And Frank isn't all that surprising eitherâ€" "

"Hey!" said Frank.

"â€"but you, Hazel? You should know betterâ€" " Terminus stopped speaking all at once. His roaming, white-set eyes bulged as they took note of the man they escorted. "Nordmannus!"

If a marble statue could turn red from anger, Terminus made a pretty good effort of it. His whole bodyâ€"even the square baseâ€"darkened to gunmetal grey. The carved veins of his neck seemed to throb against bottled rage.

He spat at the ground towards Hiksti, the last of their group. No spit came out, of course, but a few chips of stone hit the dirt.

"Terminus!" Hazel yelped at the spitting statue. "Whatâ€"?"

"Dude..." Frank whispered, his eyes darting between Terminus and Hikstiâ€"the latter of which stared back at the statue vacantly.

Percy couldn't blame them for their bewilderment. Terminus had just gone from nettled to apoplectic in mid-sentence. The son of Poseidon was only caught slightly less off-guard than his friends; he had seen the reaction the Lares had to the older manâ€"fleeing at the

sight of him, melting into walls and hissing obscenities... If the old Romans hated Greeks, it was nothing compared to what they thought of the 'barbarian Norse'. This was more than the distain they harbored for _Greacus_â€”the culture they conquered hundreds of years feared Hiksti and whatever he represented.

Hiksti didn't seem to mind. He had his bow un-shouldered and gazed at Terminus with that same bland expression.

His apathy only seemed to further incense the god.

"Greeks are one thing! But to _dare_ present a Northerner at my borders....!"

"He needs to," Hazel inserted quickly. "He has news from the Eastern godsâ€”"

Terminus wouldn't hear it. "I don't care if he has news from Jupiter himself! If you think I'm allowing one of _his_ kind in these walls after what they did to usâ€”!"

"Yes," Hiksti spoke up, his voice as dry as his expression. "Because that was all _my_ _doing_."

"Terminus," Frank said slowly as he stepped up next to Percy, "we _were_ told by Jupiter to bring him here."

Percy was quick to jump on the small pause of stunned silence left by the statue. "That's right. Our Oracle mentioned a champion of Thor'sâ€”," Terminus' scowl deepened at the name, "and trouble in the East... and Jupiter kind of confirmed it all."

The terms of the prophecy were still unclear to Percyâ€”in fact, the entire situation was all rather confusing for him. Rachel had sent him west after doing her oracle thing (where he lost both his companions along the way to their own mini-quests). Then Jupiter himself greeted him at Camp Jupiter... along with an awe-stricken Hazel and Frank and a rather chagrined Hiksti.

The king of the gods did a terrible job of explaining things. All Percy managed to glean was that Hiksti was something of a traveling liaison (albeit a reluctant one) and bore ill news of the Eastern gods. He needed to be escorted into the Roman camp to convene with their council.

Percy would have questioned _why_ Hiksti needed a chaperone, but the reception the man received so far by the Romans answered that enoughâ€”like he was one of Nico's skeleton soldiers just waltzing to New Rome. Percy would be lying if he said he wasn't at least a _little bit_ excited to see Octavian react to Hiksti.

And though he had been nothing but agreeable since they met, Percy still wasn't quite sold on this Hiksti guy. Something about the stranger reminded Percy of Quintusâ€”how it was impossible to put an age on him, impossible to gage his power, his intentions, his loyalties... how his physical appearance and aura somehow conflicted...

All of it reminded him of the ancient, automaton-bound demigod. A man both cursed and blessed, bitter and hopeful.

Where his gut told him he was good-to-go, Percy's mind told him to hold back his trust.

Regardless of Percy's personal feelings towards Hiksti, the man fit the bill for the "champion" Rachel prophesied. And Hiksti _was_ _as_ champion, despite appearances. At least, according to Jupiter in their brief and baffling meeting. Norse gods didn't have children with mortals; they bestowed their blessing on chosen humans and called them Champions. Though their origins may have differed, champions and demigods both shared a Hero's Fate.

Hiksti told him his official title was "screwed" but Percy had a hard time believing the Norse gods were that terrible at naming things.

Terminus' chin quivered. He looked as though he were fighting down every instinct his marble body harbored.

"I... that's just... if _Lord Jupiter_ decided... very well!" he barked as though the words were painful to release. "Julia!"

The girl hopped back to her feet from where she was seated on a large stone and held out the weapons' bin again.

"You may enter and you may speak, but nothing else!" Terminus warned Hiksti. "This is a safe area. An area of _peace_. Do you see this? I'm pointing at _you_, _Norseman_."

Hiksti made a face. Percy didn't know if he was confused by the lack of pointing or if he took offense to the term 'Norseman'.

Without a word Hiksti turned and set his golden bow against an archway just outside the city border.

"In the _box_, barbarian!"

"Terminus," Hazel said warningly. She clearly thought the name-calling was uncalled for.

Terminus grumbled, "...can't even follow simple rules..."

The bow, still in Hiksti's hand, gave a little spark that had Hazel jumping into Frank's side with a squeak.

Hiksti glanced behind him, annoyed.

"No."

Terminus bristled and Percy thought he was going to have to mediate a war between a god and a champion.

"It's for _her_ safety," Hiksti continued, pointing at Julia. "No one should touch this."

As if to emphasize the point, a shiver-like bolt ran up the length of the bow. Hiksti left it nestled against the architecture and returned to their group.

"This is completely against protocol!" Terminus snarled.

Percy knew they were already pushing on an ill-tempered god, but he also worried what Hiksti's bow might do to Julia. Sure, he thought there were plenty of panda-pillow-butcherer Romans who deserved a good zap every now and then, but Julia was not one of them.

He looked at the statue and said, "Terminus, the bow is staying there. It will be in your sight. Hiksti's unarmed and he's not going to do anything to cause trouble."

Percy glanced pleadingly at the older man in question, who gave him a curt nod back.

"I'll watch the pretty bow the whole time to make sure nothing happens," Julia piped up.

The bow hummed again. Hiksti's eyes darted between his weapon and Julia and he smiled slightly.

"Just make sure you don't touch her," he told the girl in the kindest voice Percy had heard from him yet (up until that point it had been all deadpan looks and sarcasm).

"Never in all my... so many exceptions... just unseemly..." Terminus continued to mutter in a never-ending stream of complains. He tisked loudly and said, "Very well. I'll be watching you, _Nordmannus_. _If I hear of any confrontations, just _one_ act of graffiti, I'll slap your face so hard you'll think my arms were made of marble."

The bleak stare Hiksti gave Terminus was almost enough for Percy to laugh. _Almost_. Terminus still sported a dangerous shade of slate as they all stepped past him.

Their group made it three steps down into the city before Hiksti paused. He clicked his tongue, his expression returned to one of exasperation, and he turned back to his bow.

"Are youâ€"? Ugh. Fine."

Percy, Frank and Hazel watched as the champion tromped back up those three steps and relocated the bow a quarter of an inch along the archway so that it rested in a patch of sunlight.

"Happy?" Hiksti asked his weapon.

The bow did nothing, not even a spark, but Hiksti spoke again anyway.

"What do you mean 'it's uneven'?"

A pause.

"No. I'm not coming back to rotate you." Another pause. "What do you care? You can't even tan!"

Percy stared at Hiksti, then to Frank and Hazel, then to Terminus, then back to Hiksti and the bowâ€"certain he had missed something important. The scene left him so bewildered that he hadn't realized his jaw dropped until Hazel was kind enough to tap it upward.

"You should have seen him with the dragon," Frank muttered, shaking his head.

Percy took his eyes off of the strange man. "Drakon?"

"No, Dragon," said Frank. "An actual dragon."

Before Percy could inquire when this happened and where this dragon was, Hiksti was returning to them.

"Then move yourself," he snapped with finality, throwing his hands in the air as he recrossed the Pomeranian Line. There was something about the animation in his gestures that made Hiksti seem younger.

"Is... everything okay?" Hazel asked him tentatively.

Hiksti's face darkened. Percy couldn't tell if he was embarrassed or angry, but Terminus' cackles in the background weren't helping either way.

"Yeahâ€" "

"I will then!_" An unfamiliar, shrill voice called out behind them.

For the second time Percy felt his jaw slacken. He could hear Frank sputtering to his left and Hazel murmur something curse-like in Latin... which was strange since she wouldn't swear in English.

Percy couldn't fault her for the language slip.

The bow was gone. In it's place stood a young woman, her dress as lustrous as gold, her hair long, blonde and wrapped in bands. Her skin had an unearthly shine to it, like her very aura was visible to the naked eye. She looked like a cross between a princess and an Amazon. She didn't look dangerous, but she felt dangerous.

Apparently Hiksti hadn't expected this either, though his shock was of a different calibre.

"Really?" he said strongly, incredulously, as he swung around to face the girl. "You want to use all your energy for this? Here?_"

"What would it matter?" she snapped back with her arms thrown to the side. "You have ignored me for the last month. Month. You just leave me strapped to your back or on the ground or on Tannlus or other dirty placesâ€" "

"I'm telling him you called him dirty," Hiksti muttered.

"â€"so now it seems I have nothing better to do than to take this form and annoy you. And don't you dare say there haven't been any opportunities because you totally could have used me on those draugar the other day!"

Her tirade came in a long stream of sentences that Percy had only ever heard by Aphrodite's children before. Annabeth may have had the

looks of a California valley girl, but this girl had the attitude.

"Who is that?" Frank asked Hiksti.

"And where is your bow?" Hazel added faintly. She already knew the answer, Percy figured as the girl's fingers crackled with white-hot energy, just as he did. But a verbal confirmation would have made it easier to swallow.

Hiksti ignored them and drawled back: "Did it occur to you that I just didn't need you then?"

The girl's cheeks puffed out.

"Didn'tâ€!" her single, aggrieved step forward was suddenly blocked by Terminus.

"A weapon is still a weapon," Terminus snapped, "no matter if it parades around as a human! And none are allowed inside the Pomeranian Line!"

His voice had gone shrill with the number of times he'd had to repeat himself. This did nothing to calm the weapon down. Instead she directed her furious stare at the god of boundaries and Percy realized, belatedly, that a Norse weapon confronting a Roman god would not end well.

Hiksti must have realized the same thing because his voice was much kinder, pleading even, when he said, "Fram, just stay put, please. I'll see you in a few. No one's going to bother you if you just stay there...right?"

The last part was directed at Terminus. Percy could hear the marble teeth grinding. Apparently Terminus didn't like the Norseman speaking to him, let alone giving him indirect orders.

The girl crossed her arms and sniffed, turning away from Terminus.

"Fine," she bit out and Percy was admittedly impressed with how quickly Hiksti got through to her. "At least let me play with the Greek cutie."

She pointed at Julia, who held the weapon's bin in a white-knuckled grip and stared at 'Fram' in a trance of wonder.

It took Percy another moment to realize it was not Julia she pointed at, but the box in her hands.

Before Terminus could start yelling about protocol, before Hiksti could argue or Percy could object, the golden girl reached into the bin and pulled out Riptide.

"Hey!" Percy immediately objected. "Put that back!"

She twirled her finger around the tip of the cap and ignored him.

"Ooh, powerful," she cooed.

"Framherja! Drop it!" Hiksti ordered.

Framherja, Percy realized in the back of his mind, must have been the weapon's name.

The force of Hiksti's words would have been enough for even Percy to give pause and think about obeying (which was a feat given his natural aversion to obedience) but Framherja pursed her lips and flicked a long forelock of hair over her shoulder.

"No," she pouted. She hugged Riptide to her chest in a way that had Percy thinkingâ€"had the sword been as sentient as a certain bowâ€"it would give no complaints.

"Is this really happening?" Frank mumbled. He seemed to be having as much trouble as Percy in comprehending the unexpected situation. At least _his_ weapon wasn't currently being held hostage by a..._bow._

Hiksti ran a hand through his hair and fisted it against the strands at the back.

"Fram," he began with very strained patience, "you're being ridiculous."

"_You're_ being ridiculous," she countered.

Percy just kept his eyes on his weapon, wincing as she waved it about in her fist. He was reluctant to try and forcibly take it from the girl given the occasional spark that rolled off her hair when she shouted.

"Really? You can't sit tight for like _five_ minutes?"

"You're always leaving me behind these days."

"Well, Iâ€"I've been busy!"

"Then maybe _I'll_ _be_ too busy the next time you need to light some revenant on fire!"

"Except I don't need you to light things on fire," Hiksti pointed out. "We both know this."

Percy didn't know this. Neither did Frank or Hazel. They all shared an alarmed look.

Framherja stamped her foot. "Why bother taking me along at all if you're just going to _abandon_ me and not even have the decency to rotate me in the sun."

Hiksti roughly withdrew his hand from his hair.

"I'll just leave you in the tool shed next time, shall I? Right next to the rakes."

Framherja stomped her foot again and let out a strangled, archaic roar. Percy got the impression that she wasn't a fan of rakes.

"Stop that," snapped Hiksti. "You can't behave for ten minutes? That's all I'm asking."

"You said it was just five before."

"Whatever! Why can't you just be grateful I don't leave you in the weapon's bin?"

Framherja took in a deep breath and then exhaled through her nose like an incensed bull.

"Fine. I'll wait hereâ€"like this," she turned to Terminus with a wild look in her eye, daring him to argue against her human form. "With THIS."

And she shook Riptide in her fist.

"Fine," Hiksti agreed quickly. "We shouldn't be long."

Percy felt this was a bit much.

"Heyâ€" " he immediately began to protest but Hiksti was already herding him and the others deeper into the city.

"Just let it happen," Hiksti muttered.

"Butâ€" "

"Sorry about that," the man went on to Frank and Hazel, still ushering them along. "She's been so testy these days. I don't know what's wrong with her. Your sword will be fine, Percy. She always gets bored with them sooner or later."

Percy wanted to argue that this wasn't his problem and why couldn't Hiksti control his own weapons (and why was he even arguing with his weapon in the first place?) but Hiksti already had them in the housing district.

"So..." Frank began awkwardly. "Can Riptide turn intoâ€" "

"No," said Percy shortly, still thinking of his poor, hostage sword.

"Probably," said Hiksti.

Percy stumbled.

"Wait, what?"

But Hiksti had shoved his hands in his pockets and strolled through New Rome as though he already knew the streets by heart, grinning as Lares cleared from his path in a flurry of obscenities.

* * *

><p>##### </p>

* * *

><p>AN: **I'm back! ...ish</p>

Wow... how bizarre was all this? Anyone who follows my DA page knows that's I've been on a HUGE PJ kick as well as a HUGE Framherja-has-a-human-form kick (check out my DA for pictures of her). If you haven't figured it out, _Hiksti_ is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the third (it's what his name would sound like to English speakers).

Just a note: Hiccup is in a ****bad mood****. He's already a bit cranky just from dealing with gods (as we know, they always manage to rile him up), and then he was forced to walk through a Roman camp with people/ghosts pointing left and right at him whispering rude things... like the fact that he is a Viking... something he tries to ignore. His patience was a little absent by the time they reached Terminus.

So... opinions on the chapter? I tried to alter my writing style a bit to be more PJO-books oriented. It's told mostly from Percy's POV. PJ and crew IC/OOC? Hiccup too much of a poopface?

Let me know! And be grateful PJ's gotten me back into writing somewhat :)

7. Astrid's Story

"In the end, Astrid realizes that she doesn't _know_ what she wants and ****that's okay****."

****Astrid's Story****

He left.

Hiccup left.

Astrid Hofferson was in a bad place when she last saw Hiccup, if the reader can remember. It was bad enough that she lost the attention of her peers and village, but she lost her place as the Most Valuable Trainee. By this point in the story, Astrid was driven into such anger and such suspicion that she had knocked down Hiccup, stepped on him, and hit him with the butt of her axe.

She'd be lying if she said that didn't relieve a _little_ bit of her stress.

So, yes, Astrid was not in a very stable condition when she last saw Hiccup, and that stability took a further turn by the reaction of the village to her revelation of Hiccup's secret. She told them, plainly, that Hiccup was harboring a Night Fury, catering to it like a dear pet. They laughed at her.

Bear in mind, Astrid was proven _right_. Hiccup was up to no good. Not only did he cheat to defeat all those dragons, but he was also consorting with their generation-old enemy. He was riding on the back of a _dragon_—the creatures that ravaged their village time and again, the monsters that razed their crops, killed Vikings, and tore limbs from sockets.

This was the moment Astrid was waiting for.

Too bad the village didn't believe her. Astrid discovered a traitor in their midst, the bane of her last two weeks, she regained her title of best-young-Viking-warrior and the village initially chose to side with _him._ And why wouldn't they? Hiccup had become their cherished heir; everything the village and chief had been waiting for. How could they just turn their back on him so quickly?

The village didn't believe her and it burned Astrid's already wounded ego more than she could stand. Her resentment of Hiccup churned with indignation and loathing and she knew in that moment that she could _never_ _forgive_ him.

Naturally, with time and investigation, the truth came out and Astrid reveled in it.

Of course she was right.

Of course she was telling the truth.

She wouldn't lie to the village _like he did_. She'd never leave it, never abandon its people, _like he did_.

All eyes were on her. She was back on top and people were finally listening to her again. She trained harder than ever because Berk _needed_ _and_ she would make them recognize this. Never would they doubt her again. Never would they even _think_ of choosing a traitor over her. Within months, Astrid was fighting back-to-back with Phlegma the Fierce, Burthair, Gobber the Belch. With _Stoick_ the Vast._

But even when she was right, even as people went back to looking at_ her _as the prime example of a young Viking warrior, Astrid still felt _sick_ thinking about _Hiccup_. It made no sense because she had won, he was _gone_—months by this point—and still he would leave her mind.

He was always there, reminding her of that time he became the apple of the village's eye by trickery and deceit. Every dragon that tore through a good Viking or left a family homeless would remind Astrid that somewhere out there, Hiccup was riding one, and she would be driven by that anger.

For a while she reveled in her prowess and reputation so much that she didn't notice the increasing frequency of attacks.

It wasn't until they were attacked three nights in a row that Astrid realized something was wrong. She was sluggish by that third night. She didn't have full rotation of her shield arm after a bad burn and it cost her some broken ribs. By the next morning the Bardison children were orphaned. The Hallmans and Stengers lost their homes. The Dalgaards lost their farmland, their prize cattle, their entire livelihood.

Berk was dying. This wasn't like her parents time, or her grandparents time. This wasn't like the stories she was told as a child where dragon raids neatly played into Viking heroics. This was devastating. Astrid fought something far worse and the luster of being the Village Hero quickly waned as the pressure increased. The older generation leaned more heavily on hers as they dwindled in number and skill.

Hiccup popped up in her mind still. Far less frequently, thankfully, but still there any time she saw the chief with his heavy brow and lined cheeks. She wished she could let him go, forget him as so many villagers seemed to have done and move on, but she couldn't. Talk of him had long stopped, the pitying looks towards their chief—the whispers—all over, but Hiccup stayed in her mind because of how he looked at her. He looked at her like she had disappointed him. Her. The disappointment. It was ludicrous.

It didn't make it any less infuriating.

She wanted to see Hiccup again just to pound in his face, to show him what his precious dragons were doing to his village, and hope he felt nothing but bone-numbing remorse before she smashed in his face again.

Others Astrid's age were getting married now. Some had children. Even with the incident of attack, Berk pressed forward. Astrid spent her days and nights fighting, training, following war talks, but that didn't stop villagers from looking at her. Berk needed to hold its population more than ever. Young Vikings were trying to juggle fighting and starting families more frantically, so why couldn't she? She had been so willing to be the example until that point. In battle, Astrid led by example. Why shouldn't she do the same for life?

Because she didn't want to. She wasn't ready. She didn't think she was ready, anyway. Astrid wanted to continue being the example of her generation—it was her niche—she wanted to live up to every expectation because they needed a leader. Stoick recovered from the loss of his son but he still slipped, he struggled. Astrid could see it and she wanted to help him take the mantle but she didn't know if she could be everything Berk needed right now. There was something inside her that began to fight against maintaining that Exemplary Viking image she so vehemently crafted. Things were moving too fast for her and at the same time she felt like she wasn't moving at all.

She wanted to help Berk. She wanted to do something other than fight. She wanted to know what it was like to be a mother (and she likely never would and that's why it made her ache to see her peers experience it). She didn't want to get married.

Astrid wanted her wants to matter, but they didn't. Only Berk mattered. If she were to die (and it was very likely with the progress of the war) then she would die selfless.

Okay, so maybe she did turn the other way when Grund, a suitor, was teamed up by one too many dragons (she had her hands full anyway!). And maybe she wasn't too torn up about the survival rates of those who bothered to ask after her. All the best fighters knew her well enough to know she'd never appreciate having her hand asked after.

Only sometimes did Astrid think of Hiccup and how he left. Her stomach still twisted with anger and disgust that he left them with this (even though a part of her knew he wouldn't be much help if he had stayed). But now another part of her wondered what if she left too—what if she escaped from the pressure to marry and bear

children and keep fightingâ€"and then the sickness would return.

She couldn't. She wouldn't. She loved her village and she had a duty as a shieldmaiden and if she died fighting here, never making it any further in milestones or borders, so be it.

So Astrid continued to struggle internally: between duty, and not knowing what she wanted when she should know what she wanted (the village, it all came down to the village), and loneliness, and so much confusion, and the desire to move forward as something held her back that went deeper than discomfort.

Astrid hadn't realized how much she pulled away, how much the war had sucked her in, until Ruffnut of all people reached out to her. She let herself go a little after that, allowed those closest to her to see her insecurities, and then, a little more, the village.

She began spending her dragon-free evenings out with her friends. She learned the latest drinking games and trashed them when it came to comparing battle stories. Their jokes were morbid, the empty seats in the Meade Hall easy to ignore but, hey, they found a reason to laugh through it all. It wasn't Life with a Slice of War; it was War with a Slice of Life.

His letters cameâ€"Hiccup'sâ€"and all of Astrid's old feelings of resentment and incredulity surged upward but she had better control of her impulses now. Hiccup was offering a peace pipe, some insight to the war that they hadn't known before. Mentions of control and blame and ways to stand against the army of dragons that ravaged them far too often were embedded in his correspondence, so Astrid found it in herself to push aside personal feelings and consider them. As did the rest of Berk.

Fishlegs took up war strategy from there. He took up documentation and calculation using Hiccup's notes and suggestions, and they began to see some progress. He became as important to the village as she was and Astrid found herself spending more and more time with him because he could understand the pressure.

Berk went on dying, its land and its spirit, but by then Astrid learned to spend any free moment in jest and with friends. She ignored the few suitors left. If this would be the rest of her lifeâ€"fighting, fighting, and deathâ€"she wouldn't spend it in uncomfortable situations she didn't feel ready for. She wondered, oh how she wonderedâ€"but it was better left untouched. Fishlegs started to take the real pressure now, the pressure she used to feel, and she tried to be there for him, to keep him from pulling away as she had.

Then he came back. The traitor.

Astrid knew this was coming. Through his letters, he explained the control, gave them suggestions about saving the dragons rather than outright hurting them (not that it mattered much to her when they were still the enemy), and eventually Hiccup managed to talk his way into some loose amnesty.

She was prepared for Hiccup to be welcomed back as an ally, as much as it left her feeling sour.

She wasn't prepared to confront him, alone, in that very same cove where she last saw him, just as he wasn't prepared for her.

They argued.

Something had broke inside her at his face, at the familiarity of the scene, and she couldn't hold in her resentment and hate and _everything she held in for the past two years_. Her peers knew she wasn't Hiccup's biggest fan but then never knew why. Why he infuriated her so much. That look of disappointment he sent her. How he judged her.

She screamed at him about his betrayal and what he abandoned them to and he screamed back. She wasn't the same girl who entrusted authority to have her back in every matter, but he wasn't the same boy who would walk away from a scolding either. He felt justified in his actions and that only maddened her further. They went in circles. He carried a chip on his shoulder. She drove him out, he said. She wouldn't listen, he said. He could have handled things differently if she had just _listened_.

Astrid refused to accept blame. Hiccup refused to admit he was wrong.

They vented and vented until they had no words left, nearly coming to blows if it weren't for the Night Fury lurking in the shadows.

A dragon playing peacekeeper. It was nearly all she could take.

Her aggression spent, Astrid turned her back to Hiccup and left.

This time, Hiccup followed her.

Somehow he convinced her to get on the dragon. He didn't force her. He didn't give her an ultimatum. He waited for her to choose.

And Astrid was ready to take a leap of faith this time around because the war was heading in only one direction—it wouldn't be a tradition to pass on to the next generation, it was ending with _her_ unless something different happened. She _chose_ to get on that dragon.

Astrid's life changed that night. For the first time in a year she felt **hope** for her people. They had a chance. Hiccup spoke of taking dragons out of the demon's control. He spoke of taming them, riding them, using them to win the war. The more he spoke, the more Astrid felt a weight lift from her heart.

Hiccup showed her the dragons he had already saved. The Timberjack in particular, boyish and curious, had taken to her and she returned the adoration.

From there, Astrid finally started to see _real_ progress. With her and Fishlegs at Hiccup's back, the village was willing to listen to him. They brought more of their peers to the Safe Island: the land outside of the Demon's control where they harbored rescued dragons. More and more Vikings were willing to engage with them, then ride them. Hiccup trained _her_ in their handling and Astrid trained others. Soon, she couldn't imagine life without Chip (and Hiccup had

the nerve to make fun of the name when he named his dragon Toothless).

The next time a raid happened, they fought back with dragons, and the results, what they saved, brought back festivity and light to Berk that Astrid thought she'd never taste again. Everything continued to snowball uphill and the positivity was contagious.

Her life had flipped upside-down again, but this time Astrid reveled in it. They were at the head of a revolution. She had a future again, and covering so much new ground that maybe, maybe, if she survived this, she would be able to explore life in her own time, at her own pace, and her choices would be for her benefit, not for the village's.

The Meatheads came and they thought everything would keep working out. Other tribes were impressed with the union of humans and dragons. They admired the flight and teamwork and were willing to give it a try, especially in the face of such undeniably favorable results.

And, just as Berk let their guard down, Viking nature won out.

They took him. The Meatheads took Chip, among other dragons, to find and confront the Demon themselves. Death or Glory was the Viking way, after all.

The Berkian riders left immediately to head them off. Fleets of sea-bound Hooligans followed as backup at a much slower pace.

Astrid was furious. Furious. Chip was hers and he was so young and they put him in chains. The Meatheads already made it to the Nest by the time they caught up, but that didn't deter Astrid from taking her dragon back. Their presence also didn't escape the notice of a two-thousand strong horde of dragons.

They weren't ready for the battle that came when they first pursued the Meatheads. It happened right on top of the Demon's lair. Battle on dragonback is faster, louder, than battle on foot. Astrid didn't know when the fleet of Berkians arrived but when they did more and more of the Demon's army abandoned the fight. The minds, she recalled Hiccup saying once, Human minds can protect them from Her.

Her being the Demon, who decided to emerge as her army left. She crawled out of the mountain like it was made of dirt and the image would forever be burned in Astrid's mind. She didn't know if the horror she felt was her own or collective of every Viking around her. People were screaming, scrambling, desperate to escape this unbeatable thing.

But Hiccup, more experienced in flight and by-far the fastest, took the fight elsewhere—back into the depths of the Nest.

Of that afternoon, Astrid remembered trouncing Thuggory, rescuing Chip, battling hordes of dragons, freeing them, and then waiting. Waiting for Hiccup to emerge victorious.

The Wait was one of the most painful Astrid could remember in her short life. Looking back on it, she would never be able to gauge how

much time had passed. Her fingers had gone numb with the tightness of her fists, her heart pounded against her throat. She couldn't remember if she heard silence or a cacophony of dying Vikings and dragons. She just remembered the tenseness and how useless she felt because, for the first time in years, she wasn't doing all the fighting. That was the day Astrid learned that Waiting could be Worse.

Hiccup returned, of course. But unconscious, white-skinned, and on the verge of frostbite of all things.

The Demon was defeated. Astrid may have sobbed with relief. Berk would live. They would live. She could live.

They returned to Berk. A handful of loyal, or thankful, dragons followed them while the rest dispersedâ€”presumably to restart whatever life they were taken from. Hiccup recovered, but couldn't stay. He was too restless, antsy, and had already tasted too much of Out There to ever return to a predictable life on an island.

Stoick was hurt. Astrid wanted to argue on behalf of her chief but a part of her sympathized with Hiccup. Those heinous thoughts that once entertained the notion of leaving Berk were no longer taboo. She could stay, she help rebuild Berk, try for a family and an exemplary Viking life. It all sounded nice to her, but not right for the moment. Not now.

Astrid didn't know what she wanted; she just knew what she felt. She felt like she had time. It was a feeling she could bask in for the rest of her life.

After only encountering mind-controlled dragons for the last few hundred years, Vikings realized there was much they had to relearn about the winged lizards.

Astrid heard Fishlegs was going to travel the world, re-write the scrolls on dragons, and she jumped at the opportunity to join under the title of "bodyguard". The young man would probably get himself killed otherwiseâ€”or, at the very least, miss out on hoards of information if he was too scared to charter into murky watersâ€”and Berk needed this information. How else would they further incorporate dragons into their lives as partners? Others agreed. Who better to protect their new manual author than their best fighter. The war was over; Berk could finally let Astrid go.

Astrid also didn't give Fishlegs much of a choice in the matter. She needed to leave Berk. She had to separate herself from her nearly crippling desire to please her village and find a solid understanding of what she wanted. She experienced too much war in too little time and not enough of life.

She was doing this for her.

When Astrid returned from her travels with a better understanding of the world under her belt and more experience in love, loss, and choices than most would find in an island-bound lifetime, she would step up to take over the position Hiccup never wanted.

As the Chief of Berk.

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A/N: Hitchups from Astrid's view. Naturally, there's a lot I didn't mention in this little life-summary. The death of her mother. The civil war that started when she took Berk from Snotlout. The love trysts. A son, perhaps? There's lots and lots to it, but this is her side of things during Hitchups.

A rather long note from DA (feel free to skip):

Writing Hitchups was an amazing and fulfilling experience for me, though it was a story that focused mostly on Hiccup and Toothless and only touched upon the progress of the Berkians by comparison. I wanted to give all the curious people a solid layout of Astrid's journey.

First, you must understand that Astrid's character really resonated with me for the first forty minutes of the movie, and pretty much right where Hitchups started is where it stopped. Writing her was an emotional outlet for me as well as a bit of a crutch. Through Astrid I vented every insecurity and aggravation I was going through at the time: being compared to peers, feeling the pressure of completing all these 'milestones' but never having the heart for it, wanting to keep the respect of parents/neighbors/society (when they can't well sympathize with the mentality outside their generation) but not wanting to compromise personal beliefs...

In Hitchups, Astrid was represented today's Young Adult. It's a new world and we aren't following the same 'college-marry-job-house-babies' routine the generations before us did. She would like to have kids some day but she doesn't want to get married. She wants to see more of the world without looking irresponsible. She wants all those people who admired her to continue admiring her, even though she doesn't want to follow the path they expect her to.

I think Astrid would love the Viking lifestyle until it became uncomfortable for her. And I think it would become uncomfortable for her if the war continued, escalated to obliterating proportions, and took away the pace-of-life Astrid thought she would get to maintain for the rest of her life.

Had the war just continued at it's never-ending pace, as Hiccup had hoped it would when he left, then I'm sure Astrid would have been just fine. But it didn't. She felt the pressure, she felt the crushing reality that she was likely going to die along with her village without ever experiencing anything more than **war**. So when it all ended, when her village was saved, she nearly cried. There were tears in her eyes and it wasn't because Hiccup lived (though she was happy about that), it was because she could live.

End note

Phew, okay, so this A/N is about as long as the Astrid Summary. Anyway, thoughts?

End
file.